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Crime Stoppers: Reflections on the Public Portrait

Kevin D. Carriere
Centre of Criminology
University of Toronto

and

Response to Carriere

Detective Gary Jones
Police Coordinator
Edmonton Crime Stoppers

DISCUSSION PAPER 9

Crime Stoppers:
Reflections on the Public Portrait*

Kevin D. Carriere
Centre of Criminology
University of Toronto

* Based on term paper prepared for sociology undergraduate course "Agents of Social Contact" taken at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.

A Response to Kevin Carriere

by

Detective Gary Jones*
Police Coordinator
Edmonton Crime Stoppers

*Police officer of 21 years and the most senior Crime Stoppers police co–ordinator in Canada.

Introduction

"Crime Stoppers" is a criminal control programme that encourages the public to report more criminal activity by advertising rewards and anonymity to potential informants. Originating in Albuquerque, New Mexico, U.S.A. in 1976, the programme continues to spread rapidly throughout North America; there are now approximately 600 of these programmes in the United States and 20 of them operating in Canada. Crime Stoppers programmes are generally administered by the police in conjunction with a group of interested citizens who organize themselves as a nonprofit organization. As nonprofit organizations, such programmes engage in various types of fund-raising activities in order to gain the financial security necessary to offer rewards to informants. However, at present, it is unclear whether the initial or sustaining impetus for such programmes comes from the police or members of the public.

It would seem fair to say, on the basis of informal observation and some qualitative research (Rosenbaum, Lurigio and Lavrakas, 1985:7), that Crime Stoppers programmes are viewed in a positive manner by most of the public, the media, the police and other government officials. It is not difficult to find staunch supporters of the programme, although most people understand very little about Crime Stoppers' actual structure and operations. At a recent international conference for Crime Stoppers activists, the founder of the programme was reported to state that he believed the programme would become implemented "everywhere in the free world."[1] Mr. MacAleese may be correct in suggesting such a trend; recent research has discovered that between the years of 1980 and 1984 - the number of Crime Stoppers programmes in North America have increased ten fold (Rosenbaum, Lurigio and Lavrakas, 1985:4) and that interest in the programme has been demonstrated in several INTERPOL countries (Tily, 1985:2).

In view of the fact that the number of Crime Stoppers programmes is increasing at such a rapid rate, it would seem to be an appropriate time to pause and critically consider the programme's structure, as well as its overall social impact - this is the focal task of this paper. In this respect, current literature and research information on the topic are critically considered in order to: 1) evaluate the programme's claims to success; 2) consider the detrimental potential of the programme; and, 3) consider the reasons why the programme enjoys widespread popular support from the police, the media and the public. A central theme of this paper will be the suggestion that, in terms of popular discourse, the programme is often spoken of in idealistic manner that does not

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[1] Edmonton Journal, September 15, 1985, pt. B, p. 6.

consider nor communicate the full character of Crime Stoppers' operations and effects.

The Creation of Crime Stoppers

First, it would seem appropriate to consider the development of the Crime Stoppers programme in order to explicate the dominant ideological factors contributing to its inception and initial acceptance. The concept of Crime Stoppers was originated in September 1976 by Greg MacAleese, a police officer in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This officer, frustrated by the police force's inability to control the city's rising crime rate, developed the Crime Stoppers programme in an effort to fortify the traditional methods of criminal control available to the police.

Then, from the outset, the primary objective of the Crime Stoppers proposal was to provide the police with more information regarding criminal activities and identities. In an attempt to catch more criminals, this was a reasonable place to start in view of the fact that only a small percentage of all criminal activity known to the public is reported to the police. Although the discrepancy between the number of offences known to the public versus the number of offences known to the police varies with the type of offence, Biderman (1967:34) reports an overall estimate of 23 criminal incidents known to the public for every 1 known to the police. Without reliable information from the public, the likelihood of the police solving any particular crime is greatly reduced. If the Crime Stoppers programme is assumed to be genuinely effective in motivating the public to report more crime, one should be aware that the programmes activities may raise "official" crime rates which are sometimes used as a rough barometer of the amount of crime that occurs in society.

MacAleese believed that apathy and fear of retaliation were the primary reasons why the public did not report more crime. Consequently, his Crime Stoppers proposal was intended to combat apathy by offering cash rewards for information, while reducing fear of retaliation by guaranteeing anonymity to informants. In order to reach the largest possible audience, he solicited support from the mass media so that a "crime of the week" and the programme in general would be publicized. Finally, in order to avoid complaints about police corruption, he arranged for the reward money to be distributed through a nonprofit corporation administered by private citizens (Rosenbaum and Lurigio, 1985:56).

The fundamental premises underlying MacAleese's Crime Stoppers proposal were not revolutionary in themselves. The police have always engaged in informal exchange relationships with informants, bargaining either with material goods or the discretionary enforcement of the law. The

publicizing of crimes has been a common practice of the police for so long that the "WANTED" poster has become a part of North American folklore. The Crime Stoppers proposal was unique in that it sought to establish a greater degree of formalization in the exchange relationships between the police, the media and the public. The inception of the programme would mark the first time that the police would advertise particular crimes, as well as rewards and anonymity for any informant, on a large scale and ongoing basis.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the interests that shaped the development of Crime Stoppers were essentially conservative in orientation. The programme, developed by a police officer, attempts to control crime by catching and punishing more criminals. To put the programme's approach into perspective, I think that Elliot Currie's words regarding the nature of such efforts are capable of providing some insight here. Currie states:

> "In the homely but accurate metaphor offered by the psychiatrist James P. Comer, we are busily mopping the water off the floor while we let the tub overflow. Mopping harder may make some difference in the level of the flood. It does not, however, do anything about the open faucet. Were this our only course of action, our future would look bleak indeed. Fortunately, we have other alternatives, and recognizing that we have them is the essential first step towards a serious anti-crime programme ..." (Currie, 1985:226-227).

In this respect, by focussing on the individual character of the crime and offender, such criminal control programmes take the focus away from more fundamental criminogenic forces such as unemployment, poverty and socio-cultural inequality.

Evaluating the "Successes" of Crime Stoppers

> "Crime Stoppers has proven itself to be highly successful in the United States and now in Canada, resulting in thousands of arrests and the recovery of millions of dollars of stolen property and narcotics.
>
> I heartily endorse EDMONTON CRIME STOPPERS and feel the citizens of Edmonton will greatly benefit from this program as they become more involved in efforts to reduce crime in our city."
>
> R.F. Lunney
> Chief of Police, City of Edmonton
> (Alberta Crime Stoppers [no date]:fwd)

One of the major findings of a recent national evaluation of Crime Stoppers was the high level of praise and support given to these programmes by participating parties and government officials (Rosenbaum, Lurigio and Lavrakas, 1985:7). However, the fact that these programmes keep few records makes an accurate evaluation of their "success" difficult. Despite this obstacle, a tentative evaluation of Crime Stoppers can be made on the basis of existing information.

The first question that must be asked of any programme of criminal control is whether or not it is effective in preventing crime or capturing criminals. It would seem that Crime Stoppers advocates would suggest that the programme may help prevent crime by promoting individual and general deterrent effects that might attenuate any inclination of the individual to engage in criminal behavior. However, at present, this line of reasoning remains remarkably absent from discussions of the programme. Moreover, no research has been forwarded that addresses these issues.

In relation to criminal apprehension, Crime Stoppers would seem to be successful in solving some crimes that would have otherwise remained a mystery. However, the crimes solved through Crime Stoppers probably amount to only a small percentage of serious criminal activity in a given area (Rosenbaum, Lurigio and Lavrakas, 1985:7). Hence, the overall crime rate probably remains relatively unaffected by such programmes.

Crime Stoppers programmes are also promoted as being cost effective. In Canada, these programmes collectively claim to have recovered $16.35 in stolen property for each dollar spent (See Appendix 1). However, such claims are only supported by aggregate statistics that are not overly impressive when subjected to critical scrutiny. Such statistics only consider the programmes' successes in relation to the cost of reward money paid out; a more accurate cost-effectiveness analysis would consider: the time of the police and citizens involved in the administration of the programme; the time involved investigating and prosecuting cases; and, the value of the coverage provided by the mass media. Moreover, the aggregate statistics provided to the public are presented entirely out of perspective - the statistics celebrating the programmes' "successes" are not put into a realistic context by relating them to the total volume of crime that occurs in the population.

Of the crimes that Crime Stoppers does solve, it could be contended that many of these cases would have been solved even if the programme did not exist. The possibility exists that some people call Crime Stoppers, rather than the police force, because the programme offers cash rewards. Thus, Crime Stoppers may represent an attractive opportunity structure that diverts people

with information relating to criminal activities from traditional channels of communication with the police. The fact that the vast majority of the crimes that Crime Stoppers takes credit for solving are unadvertised suggests that this may be the case.[2] For crimes that may have been solved through traditional enforcement channels, Crime Stoppers may simply be paying money out in vain.

In short, it would seem that Crime Stoppers' claims to success have been exaggerated or misconstrued to some extent. This is not to say that the programme is ineffectual with respect to criminal control, but its effectiveness is probably not as pervasive as most proponents of Crime Stoppers would care to believe. As illustrated in the words of Police Chief Lunney that preceded this section of discussion, the basis of statements made by advocates of the programme sometimes appear myopic, uninformed or idealistic.

Potential Dangers of Crime Stoppers

> "... I believe that the Crime Stoppers program will unite all desirable elements of society into one strong body determined to attack crime at its very roots ..."
>
> Peter Lougheed
> Premier of Alberta
> (Alberta Crime Stoppers [no date]:fwd)

Regardless of the effectiveness of Crime Stoppers as a criminal control programme, it is important to consider its effects in a broader social context. In this section, consideration will be given to the manner in which the programme may have unexpected, and perhaps undesirable effects on individual civil liberties and social relations in general.

Some potential dangers of guaranteeing anonymity to informants. Guaranteed anonymity, which is a crucial feature of the Crime Stoppers programme, may have hidden dangers with respect to the behavior of informants. The effects of anonymity on behavior have been extensively

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[2] Although official statistics do not exist in this regard, Detective Gary Jones (Police Co-ordinator, Edmonton Crime Stoppers) stated to this writer that approximately 15% of advertised "Crimes of the Week" are successfully cleared through the programme.

investigated in the field of social psychology. Research suggests that anonymity can encourage "deindividuation"; this is a process in which both social and psychological conditions become conducive to a loss of self-consciousness and self-restraint (Perry and Pugh, 1978:67; Rosenbaum and Lurigio, 1985). A classic experiment by Zimbardo (1970) demonstrated the potential effects of anonymity on behavior: Subjects whose anonymity was protected administered twice the total duration of electric shocks to a target person, in comparison to a control group who had their identities revealed.

With respect to Crime Stoppers, the anonymity guaranteed to informants could potentially encourage them to intrude on their neighbors privacy in order to search for, or investigate criminal activities. In extreme cases, Crime Stoppers' guarantee of anonymity may incite persons to entrap others in criminal situations or deceive them into relating incriminating details about their lives or the lives of others (Rosenbaum and Lurigio, 1985: 60).

By offering anonymity to informants, Crime Stoppers may promote an atmosphere in the community that encourages citizens to become increasingly dependent on formal, relatively impersonal mechanisms of conflict resolution such as the criminal justice system. Commenting on the merits of having societal conflict resolved with the direct involvement of the "conflicting" parties, Christie states:

> "Conflicts ought to be used, not only left in erosion. And they ought to be used, and become useful, for those originally involved in the conflict. Conflicts might hurt individuals as will as social systems. That is what we learn in school. That is why we have officials. Without them, private vengeance and vendettas will blossom. We have learned this so solidly that we have lost track of the other side of the coin ...." (Christie,1982:297)

The other side of the coin that Christie refers to would seem to represent, at least in part, a concern for ensuring that fundamental value conflicts are not obscured through the machinery of the criminal justice system. If individuals do not engage in the active debate of value conflicts directly, there is the potential danger that illegitimate or discriminatory laws, and patterns of law enforcement, could be accepted uncritically. Without becoming directly involved in such debate, individuals may not have a chance to develop the conceptual skills necessary to understand the relevant social, cultural and political dimensions of the situation. Relatedly, there is a danger that the "status quo" may be accepted by members of the public through a "rote" learning process, and that dominant interests may be supported through tacit approval.

Open and direct consideration of conflict would seem to have the potential for enhancing each party's understanding of the salient issues related to individual rights and justice. Ideally, such direct involvement would have a cumulative, positive effect on the public's understanding of the nature of conflict in general, which would in turn promote the growth of a fairer and more advanced system of criminal justice. The anonymity granted to informants by Crime Stoppers would certainly circumvent this important developmental process, perhaps fostering an over-reliance on the police as enforcers of social control.

Not unrelated to the above discussion, the structured anonymity of Crime Stoppers could also result in individual citizens using the organization as a means of harassing personal enemies. Although it appears that Crime Stoppers programmes generally "screen" the "tips" that they receive, it would seem that a call to the programme would invariably bring increased police attention and surveillance to a person who has been informed upon (Rosenbaum, Lurigio, Lavrakas and Friedman, 1985:11). Furthermore, international self-report studies have found that almost every person surveyed has committed a criminal offence of some sort (Nettler, 1978:87-117). In view of the fact that Crime Stoppers programmes accept anonymous tips in relation to any criminal activity, it would seem that a rather large percentage of the population would be candidates for arrest by Crime Stoppers. There would seem to be a real danger that Crime Stoppers arrests statistics could become a reflection of unresolved personal conflicts, rather than fair and impartial law enforcement practices.

Finally, the structured anonymity provided through Crime Stoppers would also seem to be in opposition to one of the fundamental concerns of the entire criminal justice system - accountability. With anonymous tips, who can the public, or a victim of an unfounded investigation, hold responsible when the police act on a misinformed or misleading information?

Some potential dangers of offering rewards to informants. With respect to the rewards that Crime Stoppers offers to informants, Rosenbaum and Lurigio (1985:58) discuss how such rewards may affect a person's willingness to report crime when they don't get paid. In their discussion, they cite a study by Deci and Ryan (1975) that concludes that an extrinsic rewards, such as money given to an informant, may reduce the intrinsic motivation in a given activity. Lurigio and Rosenbaum suggest that if the findings of this study were generalizable to the Crime Stoppers programme, people may begin reporting crime only when they get paid, rather than out of a moral obligation to themselves or society.

When speculating about the effects of Crime Stoppers' rewards on informants, it would seem important to consider the socio-economic situation of

the person in question. Although there appears to be a small amount of variance between communities, the average reward paid by Crime Stoppers, excluding the "crime of the week" cases, is approximately $250.00 (Rosenbaum, Lurigio, Lavrakas and Friedman, 1985:27). It would seem that the attractiveness of such rewards would be relative, serving as a stronger incentive to the economically disadvantaged, as opposed to those persons who enjoy a middle or upper-class standard of living.

In addition, some classes and subcultures within society may be more likely to act as informants for cash because a mutually supportive network of social relations is absent. In such a case, the informant's willingness to report crime for money may be thought of as a reflection of what would constitute "anomie" in Durkheimian terms. Alternately, certain subcultural values may be conducive to co-operation with the police at the expense of cultural integrity - especially when there is money at stake. Again, the danger, or matter of concern, is that discriminatory patterns of law enforcement could occur as a result of the police receiving "tips" on only certain types of criminal activities, or criminal activities that mainly occur in particular socio-economic classes or subcultures.

Relatedly, Rosenbaum and his colleagues found that about 78 percent of Crime Stoppers' informants were people whom, to some extent, were socially integrated into the criminal subculture (See Table 1). To the extent that Crime Stoppers programmes encourage an increased reporting of criminal activities within a subculture already identified as criminal, attention may be diverted from addressing biases have been found to occur in law enforcement across social, cultural, economic and racial classes. Although the statistics in Table 1 do not directly relate to class distinctions of any particular type, it would seem that support is given to the contention that Crime Stoppers may only motivate people from particular sectors of society to act as informants; for example, it would appear that few "white-collar" or corporate criminals are apprehended through the programme (See Appendix 1).

Table 1: Breakdown of Caller Types:*

Type of Caller	Percent
Good Citizens	9.5
Fringe Players	52.9
Criminals	27.5
Unclassified	10.1

N=189

***Adapted from Rosenbaum, Lurigio, Lavrakas and Friedman (1985:10a).**

Crime Stoppers, cultural cohesion and social unrest. Although Crime Stoppers may not significantly affect the over all crime rate, it may have the potential to sporadically disturb social relations in certain economically disadvantaged classes or subcultures by encouraging dissent from within. By encouraging people to inform on one another, the programme could contribute to the development of a social climate characterized by mistrust in certain sectors of society. To the extent that informants are suspected as being present, social actors will undoubtedly experience the paranoid reality of life in a panoptic, surveillance oriented community. Within certain subcultures, it is not difficult to imagine how such a social climate may facilitate social unrest and perhaps sporadic -even organized- violent behavior.

An example illustrating the potential for explosive reaction to the disruption of normal subcultural patterns of accommodation is provided by Colvin's (1982) analysis of the riot at the Santa Fe penitentiary in 1980. Prior to the riot, the administration of the institution implemented a tighter custodial policy which included an increased number of drug searches and stricter control of inmate movement. One of the effects that this change in policy had was the elimination of many informal patterns of accommodation and cohesion within the inmate subculture. Existing leadership patterns were rendered inoperative and the result was increased stress and conflict among the inmates and staff. Undoubtedly, this breakdown in relations contributed to the genesis of one of the worst riots in correctional history.

Although the above illustration is not completely analogous to the effect Crime Stoppers may have on certain "underclasses," it does highlight some important social dynamics that may be generalizable to the situation under consideration. By orchestrating change in any pattern of social relationships that have developed into a state of relative equilibrium, one produces stress in this environment. What occurs then, is an absence of norms which serve to regulate behavior and give a sense of stability to the social environment. As a response to such stress, or state of relative social disequilibrium, social actors are likely to respond in both reactive and adaptive manners.

Consider the effect that a "successful" Crime Stoppers programme may have in criminal or lower socio-economic subcultures. Criminal actors who are made to feel more vulnerable to informants, and subsequently arrest, may adapt to the situation by becoming more secretive or by using more coercive methods of protecting their interests and life-styles. For example, criminals may become more physically aggressive with informants in order to attenuate the relative attractiveness of the rewards and anonymity offered by Crime Stoppers. Alternately, criminal actors may respond by becoming increasingly organized,

perhaps conducting their activities further "underground." Under such conditions, a general pattern of violent behavior could manifest in criminal and deviant subcultures when the actors simply react to the increased stress caused by the uncertainty of disrupted patterns of social relationships.

From this perspective, it would seem that the important consideration for Crime Stoppers advocates must be whether or not the social gains of utilizing paid informants outweigh the detriments. For example, some members of the public would probably have a hard time accepting such risks in relation to pursuing prosecutions for "victimless" crimes such as soft drug use (i.e., smoking marijuana); as is illustrated in Appendix 1, a large percentage of Crime Stoppers' successes are in relation to the aggregate category of "narcotics." There would seem to be less room for enthusiasm in relation to Crime Stoppers' "successes" when one considers that by superficially responding to individual behaviors with deep social roots, a more serious pattern of criminal behavior may be promoted. Crime Stoppers programmes seem to manifest an indifference to the way that socio-cultural bonds may restrain more serious criminogenic processes.

Potential dangers of media involvement with Crime Stoppers. The use of the mass media in the Crime Stoppers programme is another potential area for concern. Direct co-operation with law enforcement officials may threaten the media's role of "watch-dog" over the police and related governmental agencies (Rosenbaum and Lurigio, 1985:61). Furthermore, through the intensive use of the mass media in publicizing of "crimes of the week", Crime Stoppers programmes may serve to alter the traditional role of the police in relation to crime and social control. Traditionally, the police have acted as reinforcers of social norms by enforcing the law. However in the Crime Stoppers programme, police departments are involved - along with the media - in selecting the crime of the week to be extensively advertised. Thus, the police are becoming more directly involved in shaping public attitudes toward crime and punishment.

The selection of crimes to be advertised in the mass media through dramatic reenactment would seem to be a powerful tool that could be used in the manipulation of public opinion with respect to how social conflict and social control are perceived and responded to. In this respect, it is important to acknowledge the role the mass media plays in the formation of public values. By deciding what types of criminal or criminal justice system activities will be reported, in addition to when they will be reported, the media (as well as the police in this case) engage in what Visano refers to as the "retailing" of the law. To the extent that such mass media reports are biased, or reflect "sensational" cases, it would seem reasonable to accept Visano's assertion that the public may

acquire an illusory sense of expanding their knowledge of legal decision-making. In the foregoing sense:

> "By consenting to the operation of the criminal justice system, the media create a morality that serves the important function of legitimizing law. Media coverage provides both a comforting sense that the law works in the best interests of the public and offers dramatic entertainment - somewhat as Nero fed bread and circuses to the citizens of Rome to placate them. But its selective treatment ignores a whole range of issues, such as institutionalized deprivations of freedom among minorities, that might arouse an unpleasant awareness of public intolerance - the very issues that inevitably receive inadequate attention in law. Instead the mass media encourage the public to focus on more visible and immediate matters, such as acts of violence and immorality, and on individual offenders, which are considered more worthy of the law's attention than large societal issues" (Visano, 1985:146).

The mass media involvement in the Crime Stoppers programme certainly provides a tangible illustration of Visano's stated concern. By publicizing only specially selected "crimes of the week" through "dramatic reenactment", the media and the police provide the public with a portrait of crime with is both individualized and extreme. It is important to acknowledge that although the police and media may provide the public with this information with good intention, one must consider the secondary or unintended impact of such actions.

Related to the above concern of Visano is the concern that Crime Stoppers, like other conservative programmes of criminal control, tends to obscure other important issues relating to crime and social welfare. By focusing on individual cases of criminal activity, the programme has the potential of protecting the existing social structure of society from critical evaluation. To the extent that the advertised crimes of the week are represented as individualistic and socially decontextualized acts, Crime Stoppers' use of the mass media may promote a "homogeneity of public conciousness" (Gussfield, 1981) that tends to only consider a limited range of punitive solutions to the "crime problem." Criminal behavior may become something that is seen as either inevitable, or the result of unrestrained human nature. By publicizing individual incidents in a decontextualized manner, attention is also diverted away from questions concerning the formal causes of crime (why certain activities are made illegal in the first place), as well as more fundamental criminogenic factors.

The Acceptance of Crime Stoppers

From the discussion of Crime Stoppers to this point, it should be clear that in order for the programme to function effectively, it must be accepted by the police, the public and the media. In this section, consideration will be given to the factors that may encourage the programme's popular acceptance despite its potential dangers.

The police. Considered strictly from a law enforcement perspective, one would not be surprised to find police forces enthusiastic about the programme. As was discussed above, the programme was developed by a law enforcement official with the intention that it would serve as an investigative tool for the police. There is little doubt that the programme catches more criminals, although it is difficult to ascertain what type and exactly how many.

There are other pragmatic reasons why the Crime Stoppers programme may seem attractive to the police. One would expect that the programme may give the police officer a stronger bargaining position with informants, or even witnesses, when anonymity can be offered along with the prospect of a reward. In addition, the programme would seem to serve as a public relations tool for the police in general. Respect, and subsequently co-operation with the police, may be promoted if they are perceived by the public to be primarily involved in the detection and arrest of serious criminals. Indeed, on the basis of the advertised "crimes of the week," Crime Stoppers appears to be after "big time" criminals; however, as discussed earlier, such criminal types are not the people the programme most often arrests. An illustration of the manner in which Crime Stoppers advocates communicate the belief that the programme chases serious criminals is provided by Tily in his handbook "Crime Stoppers: It Works!." Tily provides a description of Crime Stoppers solved crime in an article entitled: "The 'Winrock Rapist' -- A Typical Example" (Tily, 1985:9).

Regardless of specific law enforcement advantages, one cannot ignore the possibility that the Crime Stoppers programme may have a certain detrimental potential when considered from a broader social perspective.

The media. When considered empathetically, the reasons why the police are supportive of the Crime Stoppers programme do not appear be that difficult to understand. However, the acceptance of, and active participation in the programme by the media is a more curious situation. Crime Stoppers programmes generally encounter little difficulty gaining the co-operation of the media in advertising particular crimes or the programme in general. Table 2 illustrates that, according to persons involved in starting up a Crime Stoppers programme, approximately 75% of the media were found to be "co-operative."

Table 2: Co-operation of the media with Crime Stoppers:*

Media Type	Co-operative	Neutral	Unco-operative
Daily Papers	68.3%	22.7%	9.0%
Radio Stations	81.8%	10.9%	7.3%
VHF/UHF T.V.	73.5%	15.0%	11.5%
Cable T.V.	78.1%	12.3%	9.6%

*Rosenbaum, Lurigio, Lavrakas and Friedman (1985:18a).

At first glance, the data in the above table may seem somewhat surprising in view of the fact that it is a fundamental tenant of Crime Stoppers that no money will be paid to the media for advertising (Tily, 1985:7). One must question what motivates the media to enthusiastically donate their services to this programme.

First, Crime Stoppers provides the media with an opportunity to provide public service. Crime Stoppers International, which is an umbrella organization for these programmes, is quick to point out that various media operations have received awards, notoriety and respect as a result of their participation with Crime Stoppers. Furthermore, the media is acutely sensitive to the public's interest and fascination with crime. The dramatic content of crime has been, and is currently, the successful platform of countless novels, movies and television series. Crime Stoppers International advises that many media organizations have experienced increased sales, ratings and public service awards during the sales periods in which they featured a "crime of the week" (Alberta Crime Stoppers, [no date]).

Perhaps the media's willingness to cooperate with Crime Stoppers is not that inexplicable when one considers this participation as a method of providing a public service, while at the same time increasing prestige and profits. After all, benevolent intentions aside, the vast majority of media organizations have commercial interests that are pursued in the context of a free-market economy. It is not surprising that Rosenbaum and his colleagues found that a consistent problem mentioned by persons who were involved in starting up a Crime Stoppers programme was the question of exclusivity with the media, as opposed to a question of support (Rosenbaum, Lurigio, Lavrakas and Friedman, 1985:14).

The public. There has yet to be a systematic investigation evaluating public attitudes toward Crime Stoppers programmes. However, in their national survey of these programmes, Rosenbaum concluded from their informal observations that most citizens enjoy their exposure to the programme

while not having any serious concerns regarding its operations (Rosenbaum, Lurigio, Lavrakas and Friedman, 1985:9). In addition, the growth in the number of Crime Stoppers programmes in operation suggests that they enjoy considerable popular support whether it be in the form of active participation or tacit approval (See Table 3).

Table 3: Number of Crime Stoppers Programmes by Year:*

Year	Number of Programmes Operating
1980	48
1981	135
1982	300
1983	405
1984	500

***Adapted from Rosenbaum, Lurigio and Lavrakas (1985:4a).**

To understand why the public seemingly accepts the Crime Stoppers programme, one must consider how the programme is presented and speculate in relation to how it is perceived. As I previously stated, a major finding in the recent evaluation of Crime Stoppers programmes in the U.S.A. was the high level of praise and support given to the Crime Stoppers programmes by people involved with its administration and operation (Rosenbaum, Lurigio and Lavrakas, 1985:7). With this in mind, it would seem to follow that the persons advocating the programme would, perhaps with integrity and altruistic intention, try to present the programme to the public in the most favourable light possible. The public relations strategy (or impression management strategy) of Crime Stoppers is relatively simple and inextricably related to their day to day advertising operations. Basically, Crime Stoppers' advocates emphasize the programme's successes with respect to what one might call the "catch of the day," while ignoring the programme's detrimental potential.

Undoubtedly, a primary factor contributing to favourable perception of the programme by the public is the publicity given by the mass media to a featured "crime of the week." As was mentioned above, the advertised crime is usually of a serious nature, and when aided by dramatic reenactment, Crime Stoppers appears to be chasing very serious criminals. Few people seem to be aware of the fact that Crime Stoppers is only successful in a relatively small percentage of the "crimes of the week" advertised; as was discussed above, most of the programme's "successes" are found in relation to unadvertised criminal activity. Perhaps the public would be more sensitive to the potential dangers of Crime Stoppers' operations if the programme were perceived as

having "street" class criminals as its primary targets as opposed to the relatively sensational and horrendous characters advertised through the mass media.

A second factor contributing to the public's acceptance of the programme is that the statistical information provided appears to be systematically biased in a manner which enhances Crime Stoppers apparent success rate and public image (supra, p.6). Although the public is probably unaware of it, only selected pieces of information relating to the programme activities are given to them for consideration. However, even if Crime Stoppers records were more accessible, it appears that their incomplete state would make attempts at conclusive evaluation a difficult task. In their national evaluation of Crime Stoppers programmes, Rosenbaum and his colleagues found:

> "Program record keeping practices generally leave much room for improvement. Key variables related to program operations and effectiveness are often unreliably measured or sporadically documented. There is a need to develop nationally - accepted standards for measuring performance..." (Rosenbaum, Lurigio and Lavrakas, 1985:14).

One must question why Crime Stoppers administrators are unmotivated to keep an accurate account of their activities. It would also seem reasonable to ask why administration officials in the various police forces allow such programmes to become so bureaucratically lax. Presumably, most police forces do not escape the demand for detailed documentation of their activities, so one must wonder why police involvement in Crime Stoppers programmes is any exception.

Third, the public image of the programme is further protected by the anonymity Crime Stoppers guarantees to its informants. By providing anonymity to "tipsters," the potentially illegitimate or illegal methods used by informants to collect the information are shielded from formal evaluation and public scrutiny. Hence, the public only hears about the successful resolution of many of these cases, without having to consider the manner in which the success was achieved. In reality, Crime Stoppers has been structured in a manner that allows it to operate in ignorance of potential injustices that it may shield, or possibly even promote. By guaranteeing anonymity to its informants, Crime Stoppers turns a blind eye to its detrimental potential. If a challenge is raised in relation to the actions of one of Crime Stoppers paid informants, the legitimacy of the programme is protected by its structured ignorance. Crime Stoppers is able to keep any "skeletons" that it may have - knowingly or unknowingly- not in a closet, but in a steel reinforced vault.

A final characteristic of the Crime Stoppers programme that helps it manage a favourable public image is the fact that it is a nonprofit organization administered by "interested" citizens. Because the programme is run by board of "volunteers," the public may assume a benevolent intention on the board's behalf without considering the detrimental effects the programme may manifest. Unlike government law enforcement agencies, the board of directors for Crime Stoppers, are - for the most part - not obligated to discuss their activities with the public unless so inclined. Thus, the programme is protected through yet another mechanism that shields it from critical scrutiny.

Conclusion

As I stated at the outset of this paper, I believe that given the remarkable rise in popularity of Crime Stoppers programmes, we should pause and critically consider the full range of effects that the programme may promote. Although my consideration of the programme may be thought by some to be overly harsh, it would seem that such critical consideration of the programme is needed to fill a conspicuous gap in popular discourse.

It would seem as though the actual operations and effectiveness of Crime Stoppers differs remarkably from the way that the programme is presented to the public. In this respect, it was pointed out that the majority of the crimes that are solved by the programme are unrelated to the widely advertised "Crimes of the Week," and that the anonymity and rewards offered to informants may have potential risks that are seldom considered. While Crime Stoppers may help solve some crimes which would have otherwise remained a mystery, it would appear the programme's overall success in preventing crime is exaggerated.

When considering the impact of Crime Stoppers programmes, it is important to remember that these programmes have only been in existence for a relatively short period of time, thus, many of the more subtle effects of their criminal control efforts may not yet be evident. Moreover, some of the effects of these programmes may only be apparent in societies, or in certain sectors of societies, that have large social, cultural or economic cleavages. The important point to consider is that the operations of Crime Stoppers programmes may have secondary effects on the social order that are subtle, unexpected and perhaps undesirable. The involvement of the police, media and public in Crime Stoppers undoubtedly has consequences that extend far beyond the investigation, apprehension, trial and conviction of individual criminal actors.

Perhaps the greatest danger of the Crime Stoppers programme is in the use of the mass media to advertise relatively exotic criminal activities in a decontextualized, dramatic manner. The approach of the programme in relation

to criminal control is entirely reactive and individualistic - criminals break the law, thus they must be caught and punished. Such attitudes toward criminal activity may promote perceptions that are insensitive to the social context of the criminal behavior, as well as more fundamental criminogenic factors that are inherent to the macro-structure of our post-industrial society. The technical and instrumental attitude of such a programme may serve to diminish the public's recognition and awareness that moral and political choices are being made by engaging in this type of a criminal control strategy (Gussfield, 1981).

To date, Crime Stoppers programmes have not attracted much critical attention, but as time progresses and the number of these programmes increases, this pattern will undoubtedly change. Because this investigation of Crime Stoppers was not able to be grounded in a strong base of empirical data, the analysis herein is necessarily tentative. The issues raised in this paper are primarily intended to be provocative, drawing attention to a relatively new programme of criminal control that provides fertile ground for research in many areas of social, legal and ethical concern.

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Appendix 1. Crime Stoppers:

CITY	APPROX. POPULATION	START DATE	ARRESTS	CASES CLEARED
Alta. Provincial (Watts line)	2,200,000	Sep '83	38	33
ALBERTA				
Calgary	620,000	Aug '82	804	1098
Edmonton	560,000	Mar '83	598	935
Lethbridge	58,000	Sep '82	99	145
Medicine Hat	43,000	Oct '83	89	100
Central Alberta	50,000	Jan '84	42	72
BRITISH COLUMBIA				
Kamloops	65,000	Mar '85	17	13
Greater Victoria	300,000	Sep '84	69	116
Vancouver	1,000,000	Jan '85	94	262
Prince George		Spr '85		
MANITOBA				
Brandon	38,000	Jul '85	8	8
Winnipeg	700,000	Nov '84	206	287
ONTARIO				
Brantford	74,000	Jun '84	33	48
Hamilton/Wtwrth	425,000	May '83	409	690
Ottawa	400,000	Mar '85	123	166
Elliott Lake	20,000	Apr '84	20	11
Niagara Regional		Sep '85		
Thunderbay				
Toronto Metro	2,200,000	Jul '84	201	295
Windsor & Essex	400,000	Apr '85	50	77
SASKATCHEWAN				
Moose Jaw	39,000	Jan '84	60	80
Prince Albert	36,000	May '85	1	1
Regina	160,000	Jan '84	105	214
TOTAL	7,888,000		2825	4618

AVERAGES

$1.00 spent for every $16.35 in property recovered.
Each case solved cost $65.22.

PREPARED BY:

S/Sgt. A. Vanderwiel
Calgary Police Co-ordinator

• Indicates wholesale value.

Canadian Statistics - To September 1985

PROP. RECOVERED	DRUGS SEIZED	REWARDS PAID	CITY
118,097	-	2,400	Alta. Provincial (Watts line)
			ALBERTA
1,812,240	* 453,885	85,900	Calgary
1,726,060	* 740,315	81,950	Edmonton
47,267	56,247	9,660	Lethbridge
40,410	*10,945	6,840	Medicine Hat
45,806	15,000	10,600	Central Alberta
			BRITISH COLUMBIA
14,000	7,800	1,675	Kamloops
119,515	264,500	11,000	Greater Victoria
151,900	412,450	600	Vancouver
			Prince George
			MANITOBA
4,740	600	375	Brandon
350,588	48,860	14,200	Winnipeg
			ONTARIO
12,350	3,370	1,750	Brantford
244,010	* 245,380	31,550	Hamilton/Wtwrth
130,580	116,290	7,975	Ottawa
10,000	12,000	2,300	Elliott Lake
			Niagara Regional
			Thunderbay
118,185	* 350,720	18,100	Toronto Metro
88,229	25,145	4,265	Windsor & Essex
			SASKATCHEWAN
21,220	2,950	2,600	Moose Jaw
600		50	Prince Albert
182,437	* 8,565	9,850	Regina
4,920,137	2,774,822	300,940	TOTAL

N.B. * Statistics not received by the 10th of each month will go forward to the next month.

N.B. * Alta. provincial statistics are listed separately but are included in Edmonton and Calgary totals.

CCR Discussion Papers

1. Interagency Co-operation and Communication Between Police and Parole Agencies
   Philip Cunningham. February 1983.

2. Age, Perception of Social Diversity and Fear of Crime
   Robert A. Silverman and Leslie W. Kennedy. October 1983.

3. Are Crime Rates Increasing? A Study of the Impact of Demographic Shifts on Crime Rates in Canada
   G. Won Lee. October 1983.

4. Explaining the Link Between Income Inequality and Homicide Rates: A Cross-National Study
   Harvey Krahn, Timothy F. Hartnagel and
   John W. Gartrell. April 1984.

5. Public Opinion and the Legalization of Abortion
   Timothy F. Hartnagel, James J. Creechan and
   Robert A. Silverman. May 1984.

6. Producing Personal Safety: Parallel Production, Police, Fear, and Crime
   Harvey Krahn and Leslie W. Kennedy. March 1985.

7. Closed Custody for Juveniles: Comparisons between Canada and France
   Jim Hackler, Antoine Garapon, Chuck Frigon and
   Kenneth Knight. April 1986.

8. Stealing Conflicts in Juvenile Justice: Contrasting France and Canada
   Jim Hackler and Antoine Garapon. May 1986.

Abstract

This paper considers a relatively new but increasingly popular programme of criminal control commonly referred to as "Crime Stoppers." Crime Stoppers is a co-operative effort between the police, the media and citizen activists that encourages the public to report more criminal activity by offering rewards and anonymity to informants. While such programmes appear to help solve some crimes that would have otherwise remained uncleared, their effect on the overall crime rate in any area is probably minimal. A central theme of this paper is that popular conceptions of Crime Stoppers' activities may be based on a limited range of information that diverts attention away from the detrimental potential of such programmes. In this respect, the manner in which the police and the media communicate with the public through the Crime Stoppers programme is critically considered. Because an insufficient base of empirical data exists in this area of enquiry, the nature of this investigation is necessarily tentative. However, many social, ethical and legal issues are raised that may help guide future research in this area.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express many thanks to the following people for their help and support in the development and compilation of this paper:

- **Detective G. Jones and Constable B. Montgomery, Edmonton City Police Department, Crime Stoppers Unit.** These officers were patient in answering many of my initial questions about the programme, and were helpful in providing me with some material on Alberta Crime Stoppers programmes.
- **Dr. J. Hackler, Professor of Sociology and Criminology at the University of Alberta.** This paper was originally drafted in one of Dr. Hackler's undergraduate criminology courses. Throughout this course and during revisions of this paper, Dr. Hackler provided me with the information and support necessary to research and complete this work.
- **Dennis P. Rosenbaum, Associate Professor at Northwestern University's Centre for Urban Affairs.** As principal investigator for a National Institute of Justice's evaluation of Crime Stoppers programmes, Dennis Rosenbaum was kind enough to forward to me copies of research on this topic that were unavailable in Canada. In particular, I would like to thank him very much for taking the time to discuss some of my ideas with me over the telephone.
- **Crime Stoppers International, Albuquerque, New Mexico.** The staff at this office was kind enough to quickly forward information to me that was unavailable in Alberta.
- **Theresa Ross, Adam Leigh, Mom and Dad**. Thanks for taking time out of your busy schedules to comment on and proofread drafts of this discussion paper.

Mr. Carriere questions the effectiveness of the Crime Stoppers program. I have enclosed the statistics from the Edmonton Crime Stoppers program which lists the crimes solved accumulatively for the period 01 January - 31 December 1986 in which we solved 731 crimes or 2 crimes per day for the entire year. He concludes that the solve rate by the program is small, hence, the overall crime rate is relatively unaffected. I would like to point to the violent crimes solved to emphasize the quality of the crimes solved and mention that it has been estimated that 90% of crimes solved could not have been solved in any other way.

Mr. Carriere criticizes the promotional claim that Crime Stoppers programs in Canada collectively recover $16.35 in stolen property for each dollar spent. He is correct when he states that such claims are not supported by aggregate statistics and do not stand up under critical scrutiny, but not for the reasons he has brought forward. The facts are that this is nothing more than a comparison of dollar figures from cases where property was recovered against all rewards paid out in every Crime Stoppers solved case - whether stolen property was involved or not. The number could have been inflated to include seized drugs at street value which would have inflated the figure and shown an even more impressive gap in recoveries versus payments by the program. The main point is that each successful Crime Stoppers tip assists a police investigation and shortens the man hours expended in their attempt to solve the crime. Therein lies the real cost effectiveness, particularly when you consider that the money paid out by Crime Stoppers is not tax money and that only about 50% of the tipsters entitled to an award pick them up.

Reference is made to the overall crime rate and how Crime Stoppers statistics are "out of perspective" and "not put into a realistic context by relating them to the total volume of crime that occurs in the population". If the vast majority of crime solved by Crime Stoppers could not have been solved through conventional police investigative techniques, then how can the Crime Stoppers program be anything but a plus?

The overall theme of Mr. Carriere's paper is that in a Utopia, there is no need for a Crime Stoppers program. He's right. In the real world, however, all people are not civic minded or caring about their fellow man. Police are not allowed to go on investigative fishing expeditions. To the contrary, they face severe penalties from the judicial system for thinking otherwise. Police have been paying for information since the beginning of policing. Crime Stoppers

merely publicizes this criminal intelligence gathering process and asks that everyone co–operate in a crime–solving purpose. Should someone with critical information about an unsolved crime fear the criminal or fear the police for some reason and therefore not come forward, what harm is there in offering anonymity and/or cash as an incentive? Often the police can successfully prosecute without that particular witness testifying.

Mr. Carriere has taken a negative stance against the Crime Stoppers program to be provocative. His writing style should be rated highly by those judging his work. My report card would also grade top marks for originality and imagination.

I will close by quoting from speakers at the 1986 Crime Stoppers International (C.S.I.) Conference hosted in Edmonton, September 13 - 18, 1986.

The Honorable Arnold I. Burns, Deputy Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice:

> "Nothing succeeds like success. By almost any measure, Crime Stoppers is a huge success!"...
> "I rebutt the notion that drug abuse is a victimless crime. It puts the health of a nation at risk!"...
> "Law enforcement alone cannot solve the drug problem. We need to make the best possible use of volunteer groups such as Crime Stoppers. <u>You are here to stop crime</u>!"

The Honorable Louis Huneault, Deputy Minister of Customs and Excise (first federal agency in Canada to align with Crime Stoppers), Government of Canada:

> "Public servants don't often tip their hats to the media, but in the case of Crime Stoppers, I will...! Customs officers working with Crime Stoppers are happy to pass on information concerning international smuggling of narcotics."

The Honorable James Kelleher, Solicitor General for Canada:

> "If we can stop one cocaine user, we can also stop the many crimes that he or she commits to support the addiction. Crime Stoppers programs have proved themselves and we're looking to them for an even greater impact on the War on Drugs."

The Honorable James K. Stewart, Director, National Institute of Justice, United States:

> "NIJ research shows that, for the most part, the naysayers were wrong about Crime Stoppers. The program passed scrutiny as a quality one, responsibly administered, monitored and controlled."[1]

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[1] The National Institute of Justice has released a research brief prepared by Dr. Dennis P. Rosenbaum, Dr. Arthur J. Lurigo and Dr. Paul J. Laurakas of the Centre for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University.

Centre for Criminological Research
Population Research Laboratory
Department of Sociology
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta
T6G 2H4
(403) 432–4659